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journal or publication title	Journal of Research Institute : Historical Development of the Tibetan Languages
volume	51
page range	63-84
year	2014-03-01
URL	http://id.nii.ac.jp/1085/00001776/

Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva?
Inscriptions from the Reign of Khri Srong lde brtsan

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During the life of Khri Srong lde brtsan (742–c.800 CE),[1] his literary representation expanded to include depiction as a religious king and perhaps also a bodhisattva. This article charts this changing depiction, focusing on the inscriptional evidence dating from his reign.[2] It begins with the records of his early life, enthronement and subsequent military victories and then the earliest depiction of him as a Buddhist, which is increasingly emphasised after the fall of the empire. The imperial-period inscriptions are the oldest and (along with the *Old Tibetan Annals*) most reliable representations of Khri Srong lde brtsan.[3] I shall not dispute their antiquity, but rather problematise their reliability by highlighting the "self-presentational" aspect of their proclamations.

Imperial historical sources are court-sanctioned texts. They contain only positive depictions of their emperors (*btsan po*), portraying them as beneficent rulers at the centre of a prosperous and powerful realm. However, the place that these sources inhabit in the public space of the empire suggests their legitimising role. Perhaps one reason for their dissemination was to create a positive impression of the *btsan po* in the minds of the Tibetan subjects throughout the empire. Nevertheless, most Tibetologists today would

[1] His birth date is given in the *Old Tibetan Annals*, IOL Tib J 750, lines 239–40 (translated in Dotson 2009: 122–23). Tibetan new-year's day falls in around April of the Gregorian calendar (*idem*: 12), hence Khri Srong lde brtsan was born in the Tibetan year corresponding to 742-743 CE. Dotson (2007b) tentatively dates his death around 800 CE**.**

The texts marked "IOL Tib J *n*" or "Or. *n*" in this chapter come from the Dunhuang cave complex in Mogao, China, as do texts that I refer to as "Pelliot tibétain *n*." All three types are contained in the list of cited Dunhuang documents in the bibliography. The former two types are now housed in the British Library, the latter in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Images of most of these manuscripts can be found on the International Dunhuang Project website (http://idp.bl.uk) or Artstor (http://www.artstor.org/index.shtml); transcriptions are available from the Old Tibetan Documents Online website (http://otdo.aa.tufs.ac.jp). See Dalton and van Schaik 2006: xi–xx and Imaeda 2008 on the antique and invaluable treasure trove found at Dunhuang.

[2] Walter and Beckwith (2010: 296) mistakenly claim that the Lcang bu/Mtshur bu inscription is attributed to the reign of Khri Srong lde brtsan (in Richardson 1985: 92ff.), but this should be amended read Khri Gtsug lde brtsan (as should their reference to Khri Lde srong brtsan, *idem*: 312, n. 30).

[3] See Walter 2009: xxii. The *Old Tibetan Annals* were found in many pieces at Dunhuang, and are now thought to constitute two versions whose dates of compilation are unknown but whose contents originate in or just after the years that they recount (see Dotson 2009: Introduction).

question the complete accuracy of these accounts. Michael Walter rightly raises the issue of their 'self-presentation:'

> Writing in Tibet developed to further the administration of the Imperium [and] ...for propaganda, its self-presentation. Old Tibetan documents of all sorts almost always evidence what the Imperium would allow or tolerate, what it supported. Documents adversarial to the Imperium are lacking; ...[4]

Walter here argues that an expanding military empire and its corollary administrative structures led to increased literacy. Writing may also have developed among elite families or clans for trade, as Takeuchi's numerous examples of loans and contracts in Old Tibetan suggest.[5] Scherrer-Schaub considers that, as Tibet emerged as a 'textual society' in the seventh and eighth centuries, writing would have been increasingly evident in public spaces, in the form of inscriptions.[6]

The earliest extant imperial stone inscriptions most probably date from the reign of Khri Srong lde brtsan.[7] They are chiselled onto monolithic pillars to be displayed around Central Tibet, including the grounds of Bsam yas Monastery and near the royal tombs in 'Phyongs rgyas. The words inscribed on these monumental stones proclaim the type of political and religious practices that are acceptable in the *btsan po*'s eyes. The Bsam yas inscription, for instance, was chiselled in large letters on a red rock that would undoubtedly have been conspicuous to many of those visiting the monastery. The edict it contains establishes state patronage for Buddhism in perpetuity. Such inscriptions perhaps imposed a Buddhist world order on the public space in the same way as the architecture and murals of Bsam yas did. The inscriptions described below should therefore be read carefully, with an eye for their various expressions of the royal and religious 'self-presentation' of the empire.

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[4] Walter 2009: 7

[5] Takeuchi 1995.

[6] See Scherrer-Schaub 2002 and 2012: 233–34 on 'the power of the written displayed to organise and control the world' of imperial Tibet (*idem*: 233).

[7] Lha mchog rgyal (2011) recently published a photograph and a transcription of the bell inscription that states one of the bell's donors to be Khri Lde gtsug brtsan (r.712–c.754), the predecessor of Khri Srong lde brtsan (also mentioned in the Zhol inscription, below). If the inscription dates from the reign of this '*Lha Btsan po*' (see the discussion of this term in the 'Phyongs rgyas inscription, below), then it is the oldest extant example of an imperial inscription. This requires further investigation.

The Imperial Khri Srong lde brtsan

The so-called Zhol inscription represents our earliest evidence of Khri Srong lde brtsan's public proclamations.[8] Part of its account purportedly comes 'from the mouth' (*zha snga nas*) of the *btsan po* himself.[9] Yet it reflects an oral and literary tradition that probably predates Khri Srong lde brtsan. The inscription records that he rewarded a minister, Ngan lam Stag ra Klu khong, for remaining loyal to the royal institution throughout the uprising preceding his enthronement. He thus aided the *btsan po* in bringing an end to the rebellion that marked the last days of his father's reign, and helped to ensure the continuous dynastic lineage of *btsan po*s in Tibet. The inscription on the south face of the stone reads:

> In the time of *Btsan po* Khri Lde gtsug rtsan, Ngan lam Klu khong loyally performed the duty of *rje blas*.[10]
>
> 'Bal Ldong tsab and Lang Myes zigs, while acting as Great Ministers, became disloyal and did harm to the person of the *btsan po*, the father, Khri Lde gtsug rtsan, so that he went to heaven. They nearly also did harm to the person of the *btsan po*, the son, Khri Srong lde brtsan. After the state/realm (*srid*) of the black-headed Tibetans was disrupted, Klu khong brought the facts of the disloyalty of 'Bal and Lang to the ears of the *btsan po*, the son, Khri Srong lde brtsan. Then, 'Bal and Lang were

[8] This pillar edict was apparently only moved to Zhol in Lhasa in 1693 (Hazod 2010). Waddell (1909, 1910 and 1911) first brought this earliest extant "self-representation" of Khri Srong lde brtsan to the attention of Tibetologists; though his translation is not wholly trustworthy. Richardson (1985: 1–25) and Li and Coblin (1987: 138–85) are more recent and better studies. See Iwao *et al*. 2009: 4–9 for a transliteration of, and guide to further resources on, the Zhol inscription.

[9] *Zha snga nas* (Zhol inscription, North face, line 6) almost certainly means "by the *btsan po*" (Richardson 1985: 174).

[10] I follow Richardson (1985: 7) here, who chose to leave this term *rje blas* untranslated with the gloss 'the duty of *rje blas*', though he remarks, 'that it was a privileged and responsible position in the administration' (*idem*: 5, n. 2). Beckwith (1983: 1–2) and Dotson (2009:19–20) have also offered translations of this passage. Beckwith argues 'that the officer known as *rjeblas* was in charge perhaps of paying the army' (Beckwith 1983: 2, n. 6). Though Li and Coblin leave *rje blas* untranslated, each offer different interpretations in their notes (Li and Coblin 1987: 161, n. to line 4). Li favours interpreting *rje blas* as a title, whereas Coblin suggests the more general noun '"service"' (see also Coblin 1991). Dotson follows Coblin but also partially returns to Richardson's interpretation in his use of the general plural noun '"duties"' (Dotson 2009: 19). I think, however, that saying '"Ngan lam Klu-khong carried out his loyal duties"' becomes a rather meaningless phrase; and therefore I prefer to retain Richardson's adverbial use of loyal as best capturing the sense of the adjective *glo ba nye ba'i* (that he takes to be attached to the nominalised verb *byas pha* rather than to the title *rje blas*). Hazod (2009: 182) gives the same sense with his gloss: 'loyal adherence to [his] obligations.'

> disgraced on it being proved that they were disloyal. Klu khong was [proved] loyal.[11]

This failed rebellion and the confiscation of the wealth of the 'Bal and Lang clans is recorded in the *Old Tibetan Annals*.[12] That account likewise impugns certain ministers but depicts the young *btsan po* as restoring order over the Tibetan realm or its governance (*cab srid*). The Zhol inscription here designates the realm as that of 'the black-headed Tibetans.' This epithet suggests a traditional national identity of some sort under the leadership of the *btsan po*.[13] The Zhol inscription represents this identity, as the *Old Tibetan Annals* do, as under threat from 'Bal and Lang's attempt to put an end to the existing dynastic line. Yet Stag ra Klu khong's loyalty to Khri Srong lde brtsan foils their plot and saves the Tibetan people. The Zhol inscription is history written by the victors: Klu khong's loyalty is celebrated because he kept close to the symbolic source of power in Tibet, the *btsan po*.[14]

Further down, the same south face briefly describes Khri Srong lde brtsan specifically. It is written in the third person, though perhaps with his blessing:[15]

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[11] South face, lines 1–20: @// btsan pho khrI lde gtsug (2) rtsan gyI ring la' // (3) @// ngan lam klu khong gis // (4) glo ba nye ba'I rje blas byas pha (5) // 'bal ldong tsab dang / lang (6) myes zigs / blon po chen po (7) byed byed pa las / glo ba rings (8) nas /// btsan pho yab khrI lde (9) gtsug rtsan gyi sku la dard te / (10) dgung du gshegs so /// (11) btsan pho sras khrI srong lde brtsan (12) gyi sku la ni dard du nye // bod (13) mgo nag po'i srid nI 'khrug du (14) byed pa las / klu khong gis / 'bal (15) dang / lang glob a rings ba'I gtan (16) gtsigs // btsan pho sras khrI srong (17) lde brtsan gyi snyan du gsold nas (18) 'bal dang / lang glo ba rings / (19) bden bar gyurd te / khong ta nI (20) bkyon phab ste // klu khong glo ba nye'o

[12] See Or. 8212/187, lines 16–23, Dotson 2009: 128–29. See also Beckwith 1983 for discussion of these events. He suggests that the revolt, which brought about a crisis in the dynastic line, led Khri Srong lde brtsan to feel the need of proving himself as the 'legitimate emperor of Tibet' through empire and temple building (*idem*:14).

[13] Hill (*forthcoming*) identifies this term is a widespread Asian description of national identity *qua* subjects under a divine/royal figure. It is used in Old Tibetan documents, he says, often in relation to a phrase that is never given in full but that can be paraphrased as: "Men had no ruler, yaks had no owner. *N.* came from the gods of heaven to the narrow earth to be the ruler of men and the owner of yaks." In the *Zhol* inscription, he says, the inclusion of the term *mgo nag po* (rather than "men," *myi*, or "subjects," *'bangs*) is important because it suggests that a threat to the life of the *btsan po* endangered not only the subjects but the natural order of the universe. Interestingly, the Tangut probably considered their "black-headed" people as the ruling elite rather than the subjects of the nation (see Kepping 2003).

[14] Richardson (1964: 12–13) suggests the Zhol inscription was written in part by the Ngan lam clan. He states: 'that [inscription] is the work of a powerful noble concerned with recording his own influence and achievements during the early years of Khri Srong lde brtsan['s reign].' Later, Richardson (1985: 1–25) places the sides of the Zhol inscription in chronological order as east, south, then north face, with the longer description representing later expanded self-presentations of the Ngan lam clan. Hazod (2009: 181–82) offers an equally or perhaps even more plausible sequence: north, east, south face. He asserts that the north face detailing the rewards bestowed on Klu khong (see below) emanated from the court of the young Khri Srong lde brtsan. He also implies (like Richardson) that members of the Ngan lam clan may have inscribed the content depicting Klu khong's great achievements. If so, then this description of Stag ra Klu khong could be a self-presentation of the Ngan lam family, perhaps with the blessing of the *btsan po*.

[15] See the foregoing note.

> …By the greatness of [Klu khong's][16] counsel to *Btsan po* Khri Srong lde brtsan, who was of profound mind, whatever was done in the governance of the kingdom (*chab srid*) turned out well. Many districts and fortresses belonging to China were brought under subjection. The Lord of China He'u 'ki wang te (Emperor Suzong)[17] and his lords and ministers were terrified. They offered regular tribute yearly of 50,000 pieces of silk. China was compelled to pay tribute.[18]

This depiction glorifies the sagacity and imperial power of *Btsan po* Khri Srong lde brtsan. It describes him as of profound mind (*thugs sgam*), perhaps a phrase evoking not only wisdom but also continuity with other *btsan po*s.[19] One may speculate that omission of this stock-phrase could have implied a dull or immature *btsan po* that Klu khong had to lead through the complex decisions of imperial rule. Instead, the honorific *thugs* suggests that the *btsan po* is of highest status, while his minister is a faithful and able counsellor.[20]

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[16] The inscription creates a break, indicated by three *shad*, after describing Klu khong's benefit to the Tibetan realm in the unfortunately fragmentary lines 40–41 (*cab srId la dpend…dka' ba byaso*). The next part begins *khri srong lde brtsan…* . Li and Coblin evidently thought this marked the *btsan po* as the subject of the sentence. They translate; '"The *btsan-po* Khri-srong-lde-brtsan was profound in his mind, and the extent of his council was great. Whatever he did for his government was good. He conquered many districts and cities…"' (Li and Coblin 1987: 159). I instead follow Richardson (1985: 13) in believing that Klu khong remains the subject of this new sentence. However, as my analysis shows, I am aware of what Li and Coblin also obviously felt, namely that this sentence reflects *as* positively on Khri Srong lde brtsan as on his minister.

[17] See Li and Coblin 1987: 165–66, n. to lines 46–47, on the transcription and identification of this emperor's name.

[18] South face, lines 41–49: … /// btsan (42) pho khrI srong lde brtsan thugs sgam la' / (43) [bka'] gros gyI rgya che bas / chab srId gar (44) mdzad do cog du'ang legs ste / rgya'i khams su gtogs pa'I yul dang mkhar mang po (46) bcom ste bsdus nas // rgya rje he'u 'gI wang (47) te rje blon skrag ste / lo gcIg cing rtag du dpya (48) dar yug lnga khri phul te / rgya dpya' 'jal du (49) bcug go ///

[19] Khri lDe srong brtsan's tomb inscription (c. 815–817 CE) twice attributes to this later *btsan po* a profound mind (*thugs sgam*), on lines 9 and 14 respectively (see Iwao *et al.* 2009: 25–26). Khri Srong lde brtsan's ancestor, Khri Srong brtsan, was known to Tibetan tradition as Srong btsan *sgam po*, "[Khri] Srong b[r]tsan the wise." Unfortunately, the earliest report of this honorific epithet is in the undated and possibly post-imperial *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (Pelliot tibétain 1287 line 299: *btsan po srong brtsan sgam po'i ring la…*). Therefore one cannot conclude that the term's inclusion in the Zhol inscription necessarily reflected a sense of continuity for the specific authors of the inscription.

[20] Ramble (2006: 129–33) has argued that the *btsan po* was also accountable to his subjects, as a *primus inter pares* of other clan-heads rather than a deified and untouchable sovereign. He bases this argument primarily on an oath of fealty that all other clans swore to the Yar (k)lung royal line, as dramatised in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (*idem*; 133). He states that 'Tibetan kingship was never absolute; the sets of principles that afforded it legitimacy were also responsible for its attenuation' (*idem*: 131). Walter (2009: 36) instead describes the *btsan po* as originally or ideologically separated from any clan, 'an intrusive element in the clan-oriented society' that eventually outlived it. Ramble (2006: 129–33) sees Buddhism rather than the clans as eventually destabilising the tradition of *btsan po*s. This requires further investigation.

Our extract contrasts Tibetan imperial power with that of the Chinese Lord (*rgya rje*) and his ministers (*rje blon*).[21] It represents the Chinese as inferior in both strength and character, cowering beneath the Tibetan attack. Their imputed fear (*skrag*) could either be a literary flourish or drawn from the reported experience of Tibetan generals returning from Chang'an, or both. Most importantly, the Zhol inscription questions the bravery of Tibet's neighbour. It denigrates the Chinese emperor in order to compliment the *btsan po*'s character in comparison. This self-presentation of Tibet largely agrees with the ministers' accounts of the same period in the *Old Tibetan Annals*, depicting the Tibetan *btsan po* and his ministers as superior to the lord and ministers of China.[22] The *Annals* narrative does not include a depiction of Khri Srong lde brtsan, but rather reflects positively on his reign. This is again history written by the victors, glorifying not only the *btsan po* but also the top ministers and generals—against the common enemy of the expanding empire, China.

The Zhol inscription also portrays Khri Srong lde brtsan as a magnanimous and grateful *btsan po*. In return for Klu khong's loyalty and achievements on behalf of the Tibetan court, the north face declares:

> *Btsan pho* Khri Srong lde brtsan himself took an oath and decreed that the great silver insignia[23] should be granted to the descendants of the minister Stag sgra Klu khong, forever and ever in perpetuity without reduction. [He further] decreed that in each generation of the *btsan po* and his sons and grandsons one of the descendants of Zla gong shall be appointed to be in personal attendance[24] ranking above the private retinue, and shall forever possess the *tshal zar* [insignia].[25]…[26]

[21] See Beckwith and Walter 2010: 542–44 on *rje blon*, meaning "lords and ministers/officials." Richardson (1985: 31, n. 3) notes that *rje* and *blon* are separated by a *shad* in the Rkong po inscription (*idem*: 70), suggesting that this is not one term ("royal ministers") but two ("lords and ministers").

[22] Or. 8212/187, lines 49–55 (translated in Dotson 2009: 132). For the *Jin Tangshu* account, see Pelliot 1961: 29–30. He also translates the much briefer account of the same period, from the *Xin Tangshu*, in *idem*: 107.

[23] Richardson (1985: 17) pragmatically translates *yi ge* as "letter." Dotson (2009: 62, following Demiéville 1952: 286, n. 2) argues that *yi ge* are insignia, which 'can be considered to be akin to epaulets' that perhaps reflect similar Chinese symbols of rank.

[24] The *Btsan lha* dictionary (Ngag dbang tshul khrims 1997: 762) defines *zham 'bring*: '*zhabs 'bring ngam g.yog po'i ming ste*.'

[25] Richardson (1985: 17–19) translates *tshal zar rtags du mchis* as 'be present always at the royal table' and Li and Coblin (1987: 170) translate it as 'shall be forever provided with food to eat.' Here I follow Dotson's (2009: 72 and n. 113) translation of *stag gi zar can*[=*cen*]/*cung* in Pelliot tibétain 1089, to read *tshal zar* as an insignia of rank with an uncertain meaning (lit. "vegetable pitchfork").

[26] North face, lines 5–17: @ // btsan pho khrI srong lde brtsan (6) gyi zha snga nas dbu snyung gnang (7) ste / blon stag sgra klu khong gi bu tsha (8) rgyud 'pheld la nam nam zha zha[r] (9) dngul gyI yi ge chen po gcig // (10) na myI dbab par g.yung drung / (11) du stsald phar gnang ngo // (12) [btsan] po sras dbon sku tse rabs (13) re zhing yang / zla gong gI bu tsha rgyud (14) 'peld las gcIg / zham 'bring / (15) na nang kor yan cad du gzhug

The *btsan po* both rewards his faithful minister Klu khong and promises to patronise the Ngan lam clan in perpetuity. This assurance is safeguarded by the perceived continuity of the *btsan po*s' lineage. Khri Srong lde brtsan bestows royal favour on the Ngan lam clan, which his sons and grandsons will be bound to maintain, in perpetuity. He no doubt continued to patronise other clans (like the Dba's and Myang), fulfilling the promises of his royal ancestors. The authority of the *btsan po* stretches beyond any single lifetime, and entails certain responsibilities to ministers who help protect the throne. Khri Srong lde brtsan is not able to rule alone. He is dependent on his imperial lineage and the continued loyalty of the ministers who serve him at court. This inscription is thus infused with a sense of royal tradition and of the traditional supporting role of the ministers, from which it gains its power.

The Imperial Spread of Buddhism

Khri Srong lde brtsan used this literary trope of *royal* tradition in order to ensure the future prosperity of *religion* in Tibet. His proclamatory inscription and explanatory edict in support of the Buddhist *saṃgha* at Bsam yas Monastery draw on past tradition as precedent. Specifically, they appear to cite the previous *btsan po*s' support for Buddhism through their construction of state-sponsored temples.

The Bsam yas inscription stresses the imperial family's continued patronage of Buddhism.[27] It was carved into a stone pillar a little to the south of the main entrance to the monastery (*gtsug lag khang*) at Brag dmar.[28] It contains a proclamation (*gtsigs*),[29] announcing Khri Srong lde brtsan's establishment of the Buddha's religion (*chos*)[30] as a state-supported practice of Tibet:

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(16) cing tshal zar rtag du mchIs par (17) gnang ngo //

[27] Transliterated and translated in Tucci 1950: 43 and 94–95; Richardson 1949: 57–58 and 1985: 26–29; and Li and Coblin 1987: 186–92. Transliterated in Iwao *et al.* 2009: 11–12; translated most recently in Willis (2013: 152). Richardson (1985: 27) dates the inscription between 779 (the completion of Bsam yas monastery) and 782 (when one of the principal witnesses to the longer Bsam yas edict, named Rgyal gzigs, left office). Sørensen and Scherrer-Schaub concur (See Scherrer-Schaub 2002: 267, n. 20).

[28] Brag dmar is north of Bsam yas monastery, and several entries in the *Old Tibetan Annals* mention it as one of the *btsan po*'s temporary residences (see Li and Coblin 1987: 191 and Dotson 2009). Walter believes that 'Khri Srong [lde brtsan] was asserting that Bsam-yas was his residence, and that he was motivated to construct it, at least in part, because of questions about his legitimacy' (Walter 2009: 243). This interesting speculation is worthy of further study, based on architectural, art-historical and literary study of Bsam yas and the narratives surrounding its construction.

[29] Here I follow Willis's translation of *gtsigs* (2013: 152), rather than Richardson's translation, "oath."

[30] *Chos* appears to be a broad term that held many different connected meanings, some of which are lost while new connotations are adopted over time. "Religion" is an unsatisfactorily limited word in English. "Way" may be a better translation, following the Shang shu paraphrase (Huang 1981: 211 line 32; quoted in Li and Coblin 1987: 234–35), though it contains undertones of a modern western appropriation of an "Eastern" aestheticised spiritual idea, *dao*. Using the (equally problematic) English loan word "Dharma" is more acceptable when

> The shrines (lit. "supports") of the Three Jewels established at the monasteries, etc. of Ra sa and Brag dmar, and this practice of the Buddha's religion, shall never be caused to be abandoned or destroyed. And, the articles provided [to the shrines], also, shall not be reduced or diminished from that [amount outlined elsewhere].[31]
>
> Hereafter, for generation after generation, the *btsan po*s, fathers and sons, shall make a vow in this way. In order that no violations of the oath shall be perpetrated or caused to come about,[32] the supra-mundane and mundane gods and the spirits (*mi ma yin*) are all invoked as witnesses. The *btsan po*s, father and son, and all [their] lords and ministers have sworn and avowed it [respectively].[33]
>
> A detailed text of the proclamation exists in a different place.[34]

The ascendancy of the empire allows the *btsan po* to confer high status, patronage and support on the *saṃgha*. It also enables him to proclaim that such patronage 'shall

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translating the term in most contexts found in later histories, and some imperial contexts below, where I would argue the Indic (and perhaps Sanskrit) meanings are more congruent with Tibetan *chos*.
However, following Walter's (2009: 72–73, n. 84) discussion of the "explanatory" *Bka' mchid* (see also below), I have the acute sense that what *chos* may have meant for the inscription's authors and different parts of its public audience could be widely disparate. I have settled for religion here because, as the *Bka' mchid* suggests, by this time a Tibetan council had distilled "Buddhism" into a relatively harmonised position with regards to practices aimed at a result in the afterlife, in order to spread it in Tibet, and I could consider that to fulfil certain criteria of a self-defined religion. Thus their intended audience could be those who would be introduced to this distilled position, even if their primary meaning of the term at this point was "tradition," "ritual" or something else entirely.

[31] See Willis 2013 on these provisions in history and later tradition.

[32] Richardson (1985: 29) translates *myi bsgyur bar* as 'in order… that it [the oath] shall not be changed;' but I follow Li and Coblin and Tucci in connecting that phrase with *mna' kha dbud pa dag* rather than just *mna' kha*, because of the *gyang*.

[33] Following Beckwith and Walter 2010: 544–45. Note the shared use of *dbu snyung* and *bro bor* in both the Zhol and Bsam yas inscriptions (see also Walter and Beckwith 2010: 300), suggesting that royal oathing phraseology was carried over for use in religious oaths, which has the effect of lending its attendant imperial authority to the cause of Buddhism.

[34] // ra sa dang / brag mar gyI (2) gtsug lag khang las stsogs (3) par / dkon mcog / gsum (4) gyi rten btsugs pa dang / sangs (5) rgyas gyI chos / mdzad pa 'dI / (6) nam du yang myi gtang ma' zhig (7) par bgyI'o / yo byad spyard / (8) pa' yang / de las myi dbrI myi (9) bskyung bar bgyI'o / da' phyin (10) cad / gdung rabs re re zhing yang (11) btsan po yab sras gyis 'dI / (12) bzhin yI dam bca'o / de las (13) mna' kha dbud pa dag gyang / (14) myi bgyI myi bsgyur bar / 'jIg (15) rten las / 'da's pa' dang / (16) 'jIg rten gyi lha dang / myI ma yin (17) ba' / thams cad gyang dphang du / (18) gsol te / btsan po yab sras dang (19) rje blon gun gyis dbu snyung dang bro / (20) bor ro / gtsigs gyI yi ge zhIb (21) mo gcIg ni gud na mchIs so /

never be abandoned or destroyed,' as well as provide the endowments that make the 'provision of the necessary accoutrements' possible. The donee is not a specific person or clan (as in the Zhol inscription), but rather Buddhist monks and monasteries. The Bsam yas inscription draws on certain rhetorical devices used in earlier secular proclamations, for instance the Zhol inscription, in order to evoke both imperial expansion and stability. It uses these tropes to lend authority to Buddhism. In return, this newly established state religion apparently centralised the empire around the two "capitals," Ra sa (present day Lhasa) and Brag dmar. Certainly, as other Tibetologists point out, the *maṇḍala* symbolism inherent in the design of Bsam yas Monastery can also depict an ideal kingdom, at the centre of which sits the king who controls the whole circle.[35] Thus the public promise by Khri Srong lde brtsan to support Buddhism, inscribed in stone at Bsam yas, also constitutes a self-presentation of his power over the empire.

Walter points out that Bsam yas is 'not the oldest, but the most famous early Tibetan monastery.'[36] Though it is unclear what constituted a monastery at this time, the mention of a *gtsug lag khang* at Ra sa probably refers to Ra sa 'Phrul snang.[37] Khri Srong lde brtsan appears to build the famous monastic complex of Bsam yas, and promise to support the *saṃgha* there and at Ra sa *Gtsug lag khang*, in emulation of one of his predecessors who constructed the latter (perhaps as a shrine that then grew into a monastery). Thus, in the bSam yas inscription, he may not only be promising that his dynastic heirs would continue to support Buddhism, but also himself reiterating a similar pledge by his ancestors.

In his "explanatory edict" (*Bka' mchid*) to the Bsam yas inscription,[38] Khri Srong lde brtsan claims that his patronage of Buddhism is in accord with the practice of his ancestors. This longer, more narrative depiction of Khri Srong lde brtsan's relation to Buddhism is thus supposed to reflect and legitimise his perspective; and represent him as a practical but also genuinely Buddhist Tibetan *btsan po* (like his ancestors). This "self-presentation" of Khri Srong lde brtsan portrays him as a *btsan po* seeking to explain rather than impose his version of Buddhism—through the propagation of this document around his realm.

[35] For Haarh (1969: 220), '[t]his monastery became the symbol of the new religion, and its material and spiritual centre. As a microcosmos, built as a maṇḍala, bSam-yas was centred around Buddha, and as the symbol of the new Tibetan religion it was centred around the king.'
See also Beckwith 1983: 13 on the Kosmokrator symbolism and attendant legitimising function of the architecture of Bsam yas.

[36] Walter 2009: 187.

[37] This *gtsug lag khang* is described in Heller 2004.

[38] See Tucci 1950: 47–50 and 98–100; Richardson 1998 [1980]; Coblin 1990 for full translations and transliterations of Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba's (1504–1566) evidently faithful transcription of this text found in his *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (2002: vol. 1 370–76, also translated by Kapstein in Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 60–64 and partially translated in Kapstein 2006: 66–68 and Walter 2009: 72, n. 84). Richardson (1985: 27) dates this text, like the *Bka' gtsigs*, to between 779 and 782 CE (See also Scherrer-Schaub 2002: 267, n. 20).

However, this act of disseminating his edict throughout the empire forces us to question these ostensive motives. It suggests instead a hegemonic claim to *the* authoritative view of religion that should be accepted wherever the *btsan po* holds power.[39] A religious conversion is never merely personal when the convert is also an emperor. Khri Srong lde brtsan apparently offered his authority and power of disseminating proclamations willingly to the cause of spreading the Buddha's religion. In return, these edicts naturally portray him positively, as patronising and promulgating Buddhism in accordance with the intentions of his ancestors and the pre-existing traditions of Tibet.

Eulogising the Buddhist Khri Srong lde brtsan

The above Bsam yas inscription, backed by the content of the *Bka' mchid*, shows that Khri Srong lde brtsan placed himself at the centre of Buddhism's explication and propagation. For his efforts on behalf of Buddhism, he was depicted as a religious king (*chos rgyal*) on his way towards enlightenment (*byang chub*), even perhaps a bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'*).[40]

In the religiously oriented inscription on a bell at Bsam yas Monastery,[41] one of the queens of Khri Srong lde brtsan praises his construction of Bsam yas and prays for his enlightenment:

> Queen Rgyal mo brtsan,[42] mother and son, made this bell in order to worship the Three Jewels of the ten directions. And [they] pray that, by the

[39] For these and other interesting speculations on the implicit ideology inherent in the propagation of these edicts, stamped with the seal of the *btsan po*, to the farthest reaches of the empire, see Scherrer-Schaub 2002: 268–69 and 273–74.

[40] Steinkellner (1999: 258) defines a bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'*) as 'somebody who sets his mind on the attainment of final enlightenment with the intention of remaining in the web of worldly affairs thereafter in order to guide all other beings to the same liberated state.' He briefly outlines the process by which the Indian tradition of attributing bodhisattva status to kings was transferred to Tibet in the imperial period, and its continuing popularity in the post-imperial period (*idem*: 258–60). I hope to update this definition as it relates to Tibetan Buddhist historiography, in a future work.

[41] Transliterated and translated by Richardson (1985: 32–35) and Li and Coblin (1987: 332–39). See Iwao *et al.* 2009: 70 for other references. See Walter and Beckwith (2010: 304) for a more recent discussion of this inscription, which they conclude probably dates from the imperial period at least.

[42] Walter and Beckwith (2010: 304) note that this queen is not mentioned in any contemporaneous sources. Richardson (1985: 32) refers to the sixteenth-century *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* of Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba (2002: vol. 1, 350.8–9 gives the same information), inferring that the queen of this inscription was from the 'Bro clan, hence perhaps identical with the empress whom the Chinese Master (Moheyan) initiated into the *Chan* school (as in Demiéville 1952: 25–33). I could see that this identification is possible, on a literary level; but would not like to speculate on the actual religious affiliations of Queen Rgyal mo brtsan, aside from saying that this bell inscription presents her as a devout Buddhist.

> power of that merit, *Lha Btsan po*[43] Khri Srong lde brtsan, father and son, husband and wife,[44] may be endowed with the harmony of the sixty melodious sounds, and attain supreme enlightenment.[45]

The inscription resembles an aspirational prayer more than it does an historical account. Most of it inhabits an aspirational future (ending in *smond to*) more commonly found in donor inscriptions and later aspirational prayers (*smon lam*).[46] It depicts Khri Srong lde brtsan as on his way towards enlightenment (*byang chub*), but he is not depicted here as a bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'*).

Khri Srong lde brtsan is portrayed as a religious king (*chos rgyal*) and perhaps even a bodhisattva, in his public epitaph now known as the 'Phyongs rgyas inscription, which dates to c.800 CE.[47] Richardson photographed this text in 1949, which had become almost completely illegible, on a memorial pillar '10 feet high by 2 feet, or a little more, in breadth,' prominently displayed to the south of a small bridge leading to the tombs of the *btsan po*s.[48] As such it constitutes a very public tribute to Khri Srong lde brtsan. Richardson was aided in filling in the gaps in his transcription by a manuscript that he attributes to Kaḥ thog Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755).[49] This includes a transcription of the 'Phyongs rgyas inscription, among others, and has recently become available to scholars online.[50] Richardson speculates that this inscription may have been written before the death of Khri Srong lde brtsan.[51] It is therefore no surprise to find that it

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[43] See my discussion of *'phrul gyi lha btsan po* in the 'Phyongs rgyas inscription, below.

[44] See Li and Coblin 1987: 338 note to panels 8–9. The lord (*stangs*) is Khri Srong lde brtsan *qua* husband in relation to his queen (*dbyal*), just as he is father (*yab*) in relation to his son (*sras*). More importantly, these two phrases and the tenor of the whole inscription suggest that the queen and her son are only able to pray using the royal and abiding medium of inscription because they stand in a privileged relation to the *btsan po*. Therefore their prayers are also directed towards his enlightenment.

[45] The panels around the Bsam yas bell read: jo mo rgyal mo brtsan yum (panel 2) sras kyIs phyogs bcu'I (3) dkon mchog gsum la (4) mchod pa'I slad du cong (5) 'di bgyis te // de'i bso- (6) -d nams kyI stobs kyis (7) lha btsan po khrI srong lde b- (8) -rtsan yab sras stangs dbya- (9) -l gsung dbyangs drug (10) cu sgra dbyangs dang ldan te (11) bla na myed pa'I byang chub (12) du grub par smond to //

[46] If the bell described in Lha mchog rgyal 2004 predates this one, then perhaps the authors of the Bsam yas bell inscription drew on this source (which also describes a similar aspirational future construction) or wider such precedent, in writing their text.

[47] See Richardson 1964 and 1985: 36–41; Li and Coblin 1987: 227–36; Iwao *et al.* 2009: 13–14.

[48] Richardson 1964: 4 and 1985: 36.

[49] Richardson 1964: 1–4 and 1985: 36; see also Hill and Manson *forthcoming*.

[50] Images of this manuscript, taken from recently discovered negatives discussed in Hill and Manson *forthcoming*, are available online at:
http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/view/search?q=Class=Tibetan%20LIMIT:ODLodl~23~23&sort=Shelfmark,sort_order
Hill and Mason furthermore analyse and transliterate this manuscript, correlating its readings with those in Iwao *et al.* 2009.

[51] Richardson 1985: 37.

praises the *btsan po*, specifically for acting beneficently and within the tradition of his ancestors. However, Khri Srong lde brtsan also appears to excel his forefathers as a Buddhist king (*chos rgyal*). The text reads:

> The *lha btsan po*s, the ancestors, came as rulers of gods and men and their traditions (*chos*) [and] learning (*gtsug lag*)[52] [became] good through their customs; and their authority (lit. "secure helmet") was great in power.
>
> *Lha Btsan po* Khri Srong lde brtsan, in accordance with the customs of the ancestors, did not injure the learning of the *lha*[53] but acted in harmony with the way (*chos*) of heaven and earth.[54] The document that comprehensively praises his virtues has been written for all time on a stone plillar. A detailed text exists elsewhere of the account of what the great religious king (*chos rgyal*) did as deeds, how the power of his authority increased the realm, and so on.
>
> *'Phrul gyi lha Btsan po* Khri Srong lde brtsan, being unlike the other kings of the four borders, through his great, powerful profundity and his authority, upwards as a far as the frontier of the Ta zhig and downwards all the way to the chain of passes of Long shan,[55] they came together under his sway; and south, north, east and west his government was great beyond limit (lit. "borders"). In that way, through the power of the realm's greatness, all Tibet grew to be great in territory and wealthy throughout; even internally it always dwelt in peace and happiness. Because he possessed in his mind a great abundance (lit. "flood") of acts of enlightenment/a bodhi(sattva?) (*byang chub* (*kyi*) *spyod pa*),[56] he adopted[57] the good, supra-mundane

[52] Walter (2009: 225–230) analyses the term *gtsug lag*, in part on the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* (Peking no. 5839, Derge no. 4352) of Khri Srong lde brtsan (see Steinkellner 1989). He argues, *contra* Macdonald (1971), that 'to assert that *gtsug lag* is a pre- or non-Buddhist concept is not provable chronologically, since its earliest attestations are during the reign of Khri Srong Lde Brtsan, a ruler who supported Buddhism' (Walter 2009: 229). See Stein 1985 and Hahn 1997 on *gtsug lag* as (royal or religious) "learning/wisdom."

[53] If we follow Walter (2009: 121) here, we could translate *lha* as "the nobility," rather than "the gods." I think it is clear that *lha* has the same meaning here as in the phrase *lha btsan po* above it, rather than in the Bsam yas inscriptions' *'jig rten gyi lha*, but that the meaning here is still not completely clear.

[54] Li and Coblin (1987: 234–35) draw on the Shangshu (Huang 1981: 211 line 32), to translate *chos* as "the Way" (Chinese: *dao*) and *gnam* as "heaven" (Chinese: *tian*).

[55] On these two areas, roughly corresponding to the respective borders of the Arab-Persian caliphate in the west and Tang empire in the east, see Richardson 1985: 41 and Li and Coblin 1987: 235.

[56] Richardson's manuscript inserts *kyi* between *byang chub* and *spyod pa*, which Richardson omits. According

> religion, then bestowed it as a favour (*bka' drin*) upon all. In this way, his great favour embraces both people and animals, both now and in the future; and all people call him by the name *'Phrul gyi lha* Byang chub chen po.[58]

The text once again emphasises the continuity of tradition. It forges a link between Khri Srong lde brtsan and his ancestors through the parallel construction of the first two parts of this inscription. Both use the positive royal attributes *chos*, *gtsug lag* and *dbu rmog brtsan po'i byin*, the first part gives the ancestors these attributes, the second endows Khri Srong lde brtsan with them. It is difficult to tell what these difficult terms really mean in this context. The term *gtsug lag* could be an eighth-century neologism written back into the past.[59] Or this parallel construction may grant new Buddhist meaning to Old Tibetan terms like *chos*. Nevertheless, the overall effect is to emphasise that Khri Srong lde brtsan understands the importance of maintaining the traditions of the previous *btsan po*s in his royal line.

However, he is also here described as a religious king (*chos rgyal*). The 'Phyongs rgyas inscription's use of this term, which is unprecedented in imperial documents, perhaps marks the arrival of a new conception of Khri Srong lde brtsan.[60] It places him on a par with Buddhist kings in surrounding states. The inscription overall betrays no sense of

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to Richardson (1964: 9), *bodhicaryā* 'is a technical term of Buddhism,' which translates the term in this context as 'the acts of enlightenment' (*idem*: 7). It may also mean the acts of a bodhisattva, which is how Walter (2009: 121) hesitantly construes *bodhi* in this inscription.

[57] *Brnyes* is usually translated as "found," but I think Scherrer-Schaub is correct to note that it 'would be better translated as "received," "assumed," or "adopted."' (McKeown (ed.) 2010: 192, n. *a*).

[58] Richardson 1985: 38 and 40 (with the reading from Richardson's manuscript, folio 1v4–2r4 in parentheses) @// lha btsan po yab myes lha dang myI'i (mi'i) (2) rjer gshegs te / (omits /) chos gtsug lag ni (3) lugs kyis bzang // dbu rmog brtsan po ni (4) byin du che'o // (5) @ // lha btsan po khri srong lde brtsan gyi zha (6) snga nas kyang / (omits /) yab myes kyi lugs bzhin / (7) lha'i gtsug lag nI (ni) ma nyams / (omits /) gnam (8) sa'i chos dang ni 'thun par mdzad / (omits /) sku (9) yon tan yongs kyis brjod pa'I (pa'i) yi ge / (omits /) (10) nam zhig rdo rings la bris so // (11) chos rgyal chen pos phrin las su ci (12) mdzad pa dang // (:) dbu rmog brtsan po'i byIn (byin) (13) gyis / (omits /) chab srid skyes pa las stsogs pa'i (14) gtam gyi yI (yi) ge / (omits /) zhib mo gcIg (gcig) ni / (omits /) gud (15) na yod do // (16) @ // 'phrul gyi lha btsan po khri srong lde (17) brtsan gyi zha (zhal) snga nas / (omits /) mtha' bzhi'i rgyal po (18) gzhan dang myi 'dra ste / (omits /) byin gyi sgam dkyel (19) chen po dang / (omits /) dbu rmog brtsan pos / (omits /) yar ni (20) ta zhig gyi mtshams man chad / mar ni long (21) shan gyi la rgyud yan cad / (omits /) chab 'og 'du (22) ste / (omits /) chab srid ni lho byang shar nub / (omits /) (23) mthas klas par che'o // de ltar chab srid (24) che ba'i byin gyis / (omits /) bod yongs yul che / (omits /) khong (25) phyug du gyurd pas / nang nas kyang / (omits /) nam (26) zhar bde zhing skyid par gnas so // (27) thugs la byang chub (inserts kyi) spyod pa rlabs po (28) che mnga' bas / 'jig rten las 'das pa'i (29) chos bzang po brnyes nas / (omits /) kun la bka' (30) drin du byin no (byino) // de ltar 'greng dud gnyIs la / (omits /) 'phral yun gnyIs (gnyis) kyi bka' drin (32) chen pos ma khyab pa myed (med) de // (/) myi yongs (33) kyis mtshan yang / (omits /) 'phrul gyi lha byang chub (34) chen por gsol to //

[59] Walter (2009: 229) suggests this possibility.

[60] Walter and Beckwith (2010: 302) also suggest that such rare or unique phrases in the inscriptions 'represent experiments in phraseology.'

inconsistency in praising both his religious and imperial achievements. It follows a description of the power and greatness of his realm with his adoption of Buddhism and bestowal of it on the people of his realm. The last line connects a royal and religious epithet in one title. It states that the people called Khri Srong lde brtsan *'Phrul gyi lha* Byang chub chen po. *'Phrul gyi lha* appears to constitute an imperial epithet, which the inscription uses three times to denote *btsan po*s.[61] *Byang chub chen po* literally means "great enlightenment" but may refer to the name of a Buddha[62] or bodhisattva (i.e. "great bodhi(sattva)").[63] If it does not indicate the apotheosis of Khri Srong lde brtsan, this epithet at least denotes his status as a Buddhist rather than as a *btsan po*. One of the Buddhist texts attributed to Khri Srong lde brtsan gives its author's name as Byang chub rdzu 'phrul.[64] His epitaph thus seems most likely to sum up his royal and religious achievements not in two names, but in a single title, *'Phrul gyi lha* Byang chub chen po.

After his death, Khri Srong lde brtsan continues to be remembered as a Buddhist and *btsan po*. The Skar cung inscription, for instance, describes him as setting the precedent for

[61] The text states that Khri Srong lde brtsan expanded Tibet's borders in the four directions, using this official imperial conception of space-time. It is in *this* context that he is described as *'Phrul gyi lha*, suggesting that it has a primarily royal, rather than Buddhist, politico-religious meaning.
Stein (1981) addresses the meaning of *lha* and *lha sras* as epithets for *btsan po*s (and often, as here, used together with the term *btsan po*) by looking for Chinese parallels that lead him to speak of sainthood and divinity (as in his article title). He notes that as well as a possible Chinese or Khotanese origin for this term (as proposed by Tucci), it could also be an indigenous expression meaning '«fils de dieu (ancêtre, descendu du ciel)»' (*idem*: 244, n. 31). Walter argues against this notion and, as Dotson (2010) has noted, chooses to leave *lha* untranslated or explain it as a primarily secular term referring to the nobility (e.g. Walter 2009: 121).
The two scholars also differ in their interpretations of *'phrul gyi lha*. Stein (1981: 241) relies on the Chinese term *sheng-shen*, '"gloire civile et militaire"' aid his translation of the term *'phrul gyi lha*. He argues that the Tibetans knew the Chinese term and its meaning, but that *'phrul gyi lha* denoted something slightly different, "holy, divine" *lha* (see also Stein 1983: 186–87, vocabulary 2, no. 1). Walter (2009: 155, n. 58) declares this approach 'unsatisfactory,' but agrees that the term 'is best understood on the grammatical basis the *'phrul gyi* is an attributive phrase modifying *lha*.' He prefers '"changed" or "transformed" *lha*' or *lha* manifest (*ibid*). I have chosen to leave both terms untranslated at present, until more witnesses can be brought to bear on the problem.
[62] In later histories, Mahābodhi becomes the name of a Buddha statue. Interestingly, the history attributed to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192) called the *Me tog snying po* (1988: 293.17–94.6), claims that Byang chub chen po is Khri Srong lde brtsan's personal deity (*yid dam*, see also Doney *forthcoming*).
[63] Suggested in Walter 2009: 121 and 155, n. 58; and Walter and Beckwith 2010: 302. The ascription of bodhisattva status to Khri Srong lde brtsan in Brag lha mo inscription A supports this suggestion (see Heller 1997: 389–90 and Iwao *et al.* 2009: 58), *if* the two inscriptions are indeed contemporaries. Richardson informed Heller (Heller 1997: 389, n. 2) that '"[n]o contemporary scribe would fail to follow the regular orthography *brtsan* in the royal name."' The rest of the orthography appears correct, so perhaps this is a mistake of the copyist. Heller (*idem*: 387) argues that, if the inscription were written later, it would be customary to include the name of the contemporaneous *btsan po* too. However, it is also possible that Khri Srong lde brtsan was named because he was a well-known historical *btsan po* with proven religious credentials; or perhaps they are remembering some real act of his in the past (see *idem*: 386–87). At present too many doubts surround this inscription for one to conclusively date it to the eighth century. If the Brag lha mo A inscription is later, then perhaps Byang chub chen po is a religious name that is later transformed into a description of Khri Srong lde brtsan. I shall leave a more discussion of the depiction of Khri Srong lde brtsan as a bodhisattva to a later work.
[64] See Steinkellner 1989, and note 52 above, on the *Bka' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* (Peking no. 5839, Derge no. 4352).

Khri Lde srong brtsan's construction of monasteries.[65] In part, it reads:

> During the reign of the father Khri Srong lde brtsan shrines of the Three Jewels were established by building temples at the centre and on the borders, Bsam yas, in Brag mar and so forth. And in the time of *Lha Btsan po* Khri Lde srong brtsan also, shrines of the Three Jewels were established by such acts as building the temple of Skar cung and so forth. This practice of the religion of the Buddha by successive generations (*gdung rabs*) [should] never be destroyed…[66]

Just like Khri Srong lde brtsan's inscriptions, these references draw on the example of previous *btsan po*s, this time to justify Khri Lde srong brtsan's actions on behalf of Buddhism. Also, just as Khri Srong lde brtsan referenced the Ra sa *Gtsug lag khang* in his Bsam yas inscription, so too does the Skar cung inscription mention both Ra sa and Bsam yas as precedents for the imperial construction of Buddhist shrines. The Skar cung inscription refers to Khri Srong lde brtsan as *'Phrul gyi lha Btsan po*[67] and bestows the same epithet on Khi Lde srong brtsan in line one. The title *'Phrul gyi lha*, like *Btsan po*, sets the rulers apart from the rest of humanity.

The summary of Khri Srong lde brtsan's greatest achievements in the Skar cung and 'Phyongs rgyas inscriptions represent reappraisals of his life. Such reassessments are only possible after his death. They still contain only positive descriptions of his reign, but now narrativise it from the third-person perspective. In this way they differ from the *Bka'*

[65] The Skar cung inscription is transliterated and translated in Richardson 1985: 72–81 and Li and Coblin 1987: 316–31. See Iwao *et al.* 2009: 22 for further references. Walter and Beckwith (2010: 305–09) cast doubt on the antiquity of this inscription, based on its dependence on the Bsam yas inscription and use of 'Classical Tibetan' orthography. Given what I have said above about the seeming desire of the *btsan po*s to present themselves as acting within the tradition of the dynastic line that preceded them, the Skar cung inscription's dependence on the Bsam yas inscription does not give me reason to view the former as a 'forgery' (*idem*: 309). I also do not feel that we know enough about the influence of Buddhism's entry into Tibet, and translation into a newly created Tibetan *chos skad*, to make the stark claim that evidence of the latter is evidence of "Classical Tibetan" as opposed to "Old Tibetan." The changes that Walter and Beckwith's excellent systematic analysis uncovers could be explained as the evolution of religious terminology, court language and chancery phraseology within a generation from the time of the Bsam yas edict (just like the 'experiments in phraseology' evident in the Phyongs rgyas inscription, *idem*: 302). However, since the Skar cung inscription definitely postdates the reign of Khri Srong lde brtsan, the precise dating of this inscription is not a vital part of my argument here.

[66] Lines 12–20 read: // yab / khrI srong lde (13) brtsan gyi ring la // brag mar gyI bsam yas la stsogs (14) pa / dbung mthar gtsug lag khang brtsIgs ste // dkon (15) mchog gsum gyI rten btsugs pa dang // lha btsan po / khri / (16) lde srong brtsan gyI ring la yang // skar cung gtsug lag khang (17) las stsogs pa brtsIgs ste // dkon mchog gsum gyI rten (18) btsugs pa las stsogs pa // gdung rabs rgyud kyis / (19) 'di ltar sangs rgyas kyI chos mdzad pa 'di // nam du yang ma (20) zhig / ...

[67] Lines 22–23.

mchid, written in the first person and from the partial perspective of a life not yet completed. Hindsight brings clarity of representation, but also further idealisation of the dead *btsan po*.

Conclusion

The *Old Tibetan Annals* and Zhol inscription portray Khri Srong lde brtsan as an idealised emperor. He lacks specific characteristics but retains the high status of earlier *btsan po*s and the authority to overcome revolt, send armies against Tibet's enemies and make pronouncements that his successors will also follow. The Bsam yas inscription and the "explanatory" *Bka' mchid* represent Khri Srong lde brtsan following his predecessors in patronising Buddhism. The Bsam yas bell inscription records a prayer that Khri Srong lde brtsan may 'attain supreme enlightenment' as a result of his accumulated merit. Later prayers, like the one contained in Dunhuang text IOL Tib J 466/3 that may only just post-date the imperial period, turn this enlightenment into an already completed action in history.[68]

The 'Phyongs rgyas inscription implies that the *btsan po* is a bodhisattva who led the Tibetan population to enlightenment. It also calls him both an emperor (*btsan po*) and a religious king (*chos rgyal*). Unlike the above sources, this traditional eulogy holds his abiding legacy to be his efforts to spread and secure in perpetuity *both* the empire *and* the patronage of Buddhism that he inherited from his father. Such a mixture is also found in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*'s eulogy Khri Srong lde brtsan.[69]

Other post-imperial histories build on similar depictions to these in order to transform his Buddhist image further, leaving his imperial 'self-presentation' to be gradually forgotten over the centuries. Even the relatively early IOL Tib J 466/3 text shows signs that Khri Srong lde brtsan is becoming re-cast in the mould of idealised Indian Buddhist kings. There is thus a continual progression in the depiction of Khri Srong lde brtsan after the end of the Tibetan empire, rather than a radical break that causes a new image of the *btsan po* to appear in the post-imperial period.

[68] See van Schaik and Doney 2007: 195–96 for a translation and discussion of this text.
[69] The *Old Tibetan Chronicle* is found in Pelliot tibétain 1286 and 1287, with fragments also in IOL Tib J 1375, Or. 8212/187 and Pelliot tibétain 1144. The eulogy to Khri Srong lde brtsan is found in Pelliot tibétain 1287, lines 366–76 and translated in Dotson 2007a: 26.

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